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ABSTRACT

"Guides," the College Board's software for developmental students, was leased by Western Oklahoma State College (WOSC) in spring 1993 in the hopes that it would enable the college to implement a remedial program independent of the classroom. Because of funding considerations, the Learning Resources Center (LRC) and the Communications Division had originally agreed to share the responsibility and funding for the computer-assisted remedial English courses. Subsequently, however, the State Regents agreed to assess an additional $13 per hour fee for junior college developmental courses, and the $2,000 lease amount for "Guides" was paid from this Developmental Studies fund. Though the assumption was that "Guides" could be used on a stand-alone basis, its first use was as a supplemental part of a regular classroom course. Based on experience with the use of the software, student end-of-term comments, and visits to college learning centers in Oklahoma and Texas, it became clear that "Guides" would not work very well except in a directed environment. Students indicated that "Guides" was helpful, but that they needed the textbook, chapter quizzes, paragraph writing assignments, along with "Guides." The use of "Guides" also required the instructor to act as the management system for guides to keep records of student participation and performance. The same approach is being used with the College Reading course. In both contexts, computer-assisted instruction provides supplemental exercises including drill and practice that cannot be provided in class and affords students the opportunity to experience computers in a user-friendly environment before entering college courses requiring computer and data processing expertise. (KP)

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Our First Year of Guides

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Paper presented at the Annual Conference on Information Technology of the League for Innovation in the Community College (10th, Houston, TX, November 13-16, 1994)

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Our First Year of Guides

Guides, the College Board's software for developmental students, was received by the Learning Resources Center at Western Oklahoma State College for review on a trial basis in February of 1993. I just happened to be teaching the daytime English Fundamentals course that semester for the first time in eight years. The same textbook, Writing with Confidence, by Alan Meyers, was still being taught, the only difference being that it was now in the fourth edition rather than the second edition. In the eight years since I had taught the course, however, my outlook had undergone a sea change. I had become computer literate, that is I had learned to use two word-processing programs, Professional Write and WP5.1, and had become an advocate of computer-assisted composition. So, when I received a memo from the Director of the Learning Resources Center (LRC), informing me and other interested faculty members that the Guides developmental software was loaded on the twenty-three networked computers in the LRC computer lab on a trial basis, I was eager to review the program.

The magic phrase in the Guides brochure that caught my attention and that of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs was "self-paced." "Self-paced" instruction was to be the panacea which would solve our problems with the English Fundamentals courses. When we leased Guides in the spring of 1993, we assumed that we could use Guides independently as a self-sufficient remedial tool. We were naive enough at the time to think that self-paced and stand-alone instruction were the same. Our

administration hoped to be able to implement a remedial program independent of the classroom. Because of my interest in computer-assisted composition, I was assigned the English Fundamentals courses. Little did I know what I was getting into when I took on this challenge.

WOSC offers only two English Fundamentals classes each semester, one daytime and one evening class. In case you are wondering how we can get by with only two English Fundamentals courses, up until this fall semester, our college had no way of requiring students to enroll in English Fundamentals other than on the basis of high school deficiencies. Students who had less than four units of English in high school were required to take the English Fundamentals course. But that was the only standard students had to meet. Based on estimates from the Dean of Student Services as of fall 1993 approximately one fourth to one half of the students in English Composition I and English Composition II could have benefitted from taking an English Fundamentals course, but most did not take it hoping to "wing it" in English Composition I. As of this current semester, however, the State Regents' Revised Student Assessment Policy establishing a score of 19 on the ACT as a "first cut" in determining student readiness for college went into effect. Despite the Mandatory Placement policy, we are still offering only two English Fundamentals courses, the same number we offered in the past. The only explanation as to why the estimates from the Dean of Student Services office did not materialize is that the quality

of the freshman students we are enrolling this semester has improved. At WOSC, students must score 19 on the ACT in the subject area (e.g., English, math, or science) or score a certain percentage on the assessment tests. We offer only one level of remedial instruction in English. Students must make a "C" or better in the remediation courses to pass. We are assuming a grade of "C" is competency.

It might be pertinent at this point to give you some background about the LRC computer lab. The business department already had two computer labs for its students, but English students needed a lab where they could type their papers, and the nursing, math, and science departments needed a lab for their students to work on CAI exercises. We didn't have any developmental software for English Fundamentals or College Reading at the time. The LRC lab was financed by Section 13 Offset funds and has been operational since the fall of 1992. The hardware, which includes 23 IBM-compatible networked computers, and the renovation of the LRC to accommodate the lab cost approximately $120,000. The only way we could get the offset funds allocated for a computer lab was to designate the lab for college-wide use (e.g., CAI in math, nursing, etc.). The LRC Director of Personnel felt unable to handle class sessions in the laboratory and had a policy against holding classes in it. However, we got around this regulation by coming in the lab "individually" <u>en masse</u>. We thought this restriction would be removed as of the 1994 spring semester, but so far it hasn't,

apparently because of the logistics involved. With the projected completion of the new 1.3 million dollar LRC in the spring of 1966, we will have an electronic classroom and open computer lab that will provide for class sessions.

To return to the Guides software, we had use of Guides on a trial basis until April 19. I was impressed enough with the program by then to argue for its adoption. Cost was definitely a factor, however. We had a choice of buying it for $7000 or leasing it for $2000. We decided to lease it because we felt it would go out of date before we had gotten our money's worth. Both the purchase option and the lease option include an upgrade entitlement at reduced cost and unlimited on-site use. Although the money was not available in the Communications budget, the director of the LRC was willing to take the money from his budget provided he had some say as to how the course was offered and administered, which meant the transfer of at least some control of what had been part of the English program to the LRC. As a result, the LRC and the Communications Division agreed to a joint sharing of the responsibility and funding for the computer-assisted remedial English courses. This fall the funding for Guides was handled differently. In a controversial move back in the spring, the State Regents approved an additional fee assessed for developmental courses to go into effect this current semester (1994). On the junior college level in Oklahoma, students are assessed a thirteen dollar additional fee for each hour of

developmental courses they take. The $2000 lease amount for Guides came from this Developmental Studies fund.

In the middle of March 1993, in a learn-as-you-go process, I began acquainting myself with Guides. Then, immediately after spring break, I began taking my Developmental English students to the computer lab one day a week to work on Guides. Initially, I was still assuming that Guides could be used on a stand-alone basis even though I was implementing it only as a supplemental part of my regular classroom course. However, based on actual experience with the use of the software and based on comments on evaluation forms distributed at the end of the semester, I was soon convinced that Guides would not work very well except in a directed environment. Research that Dr. Christine Ford and I conducted that summer visiting college learning centers in Oklahoma and Texas convinced me that Guides, or any other developmental English software for that matter, would not be adequate for self-contained instruction. I just recently distributed the same survey forms to my English Fundamentals class this semester and received the same response. The students said that Guides was very helpful but that they need all three components in the class--the textbook and chapter quizzes, paragraph writing assignments, and the Guides.

Soon I discovered in my research that "self-paced" did not mean a student sitting in splendid isolation at a computer operating on automatic pilot. In the learning centers that I visited, "self-paced" meant classroom instruction, the use of

textbooks, management system software to keep record of the student's progress, and tutors. We had the Guides software, but what we did not have was a management system such as Campus America's LMS (Learning Management System) used at Southeastern at Durant, Oklahoma, or CCC (Computer Curriculum Corporation) used at South Plains Junior College at Levelland, Texas. In effect, I was the management system for Guides. My findings were corroborated by Dr. Gail Platt, Director of the Learning Center at South Plains College, in her remarks on Remedial Education in Higher Education presented at the Oklahoma Association of Community Colleges Conference in Oklahoma City in March of this year. In the section on Noncourse-Based Remediation in her speech, Dr. Platt stated that "noncourse-based remediation as a 'stand alone' activity is entirely inappropriate for most community college students."

Dr. Platt went on to state:

> "It (noncourse-based remediation) will work if (A) you have a very good lab with great materials including a fairly sophisticated computer system that can track student participation and performance, and that can place students at appropriate levels of instruction, and (B) if the students are mature, independent learners. By mature, I am referring to more than just chronological age, of course, and I think they have to be motivated and self-disciplined. I have found that noncourse-based remediation only works when these

conditions are met and students have had at least one remedial course prior to participating in noncourse-based remediation."

On the basis of this research, I have decided to use the same textbook already in use, Alan Meyers' Writing with Confidence, 4th ed., correlating the Guides units with the chapters being studied. I am also taking the same approach in the College Reading course that I am teaching for the first time this semester. We are using John Langan's Reading and Study Skills, 5th ed., Form A, and Sherrie Nist's and Carole Mohr's Improving Vocabulary Skills, Short Version. As of the fall 1993 semester, I also began to incorporate the Guides on a supplementary basis in my English Composition I and English Composition II classes. For example, I assign the "Developing Paragraphs" unit in my English Composition I classes as well as the English Fundamentals Classes. In connection with the study of the dictionary in English Composition I, I assign the section on "Idiomatic Usage" under the "English Fundamentals" unit of Guides. In my English Composition II classes, we begin the semester with the research paper, and, as a supplementary exercise, I assign the "Textbook Reference Skills" unit under the Reading and Study Skills module.

Although the title of my presentation is "Our First Year of Guides," actually the program has been in use for a year and a half now. This fall semester is the first time it has been used in the College Reading course. I might point out that the

College Reading class is not a zero-level course. It is a three-hour college credit course. When I inquired as to why the reading course was not a remedial course, the explanation I received was reminiscent of Buck Grangerford's explanation of the Grangerford and Shepherdson feud in Huck Finn. In response to Huck's question as to how the feud got started, Buck replies that nobody remembers what the feud was about or who started it except for Pa "and some of the other older people; but they don't know now what the row was about in the first place." Up until this fall semester, the College Reading course was under the auspices of the Social Science Division, but it has since been transferred to the Communications Division. The two sections of College Reading were being taught by an adjunct instructor with a major in Special Education; however, when the instructor was offered a teaching position at Cameron University in Lawton at the last minute, we needed someone to cover the morning class. Normally, I would not have had the temerity to ask to teach a reading course--somehow phonetics and abstruse jargon come to mind. However, I knew the slot was open, and when I read somewhere that the best background for teaching a college reading course was a strong liberal arts background, I thought--"Why not?" Also, in the back of mind, I knew I could incorporate the Guides module on "Reading and Study Skills" into the course.

A couple of events this semester have further bolstered my confidence in teaching the College Reading. In a recent report on Developmental Studies at WOSC, Dr. Penny Coggins of Rogers

State at Claremore, Oklahoma, stated under the heading "Philosophy for Developmental Studies": "Developmental Studies is not Special Education. Developmental Studies programs are designed for students who are capable of learning at a college level, but do not have a strong basic skills foundation." In other words, "phonics" is not a requirement for teaching the course. The other event occurred just a couple of weeks ago. I was talking to one of my students after class, and she said she was learning a lot in the class. I replied that I was learning a lot myself. She said, "You mean you have never taught the course before?" I took that to mean that I must seem to know what I am doing.

The Guides has worked in well with the College Reading course. We have already completed all five units of the Reading and Study Skills module.

In my College Reading, as in my English Fundamentals course, the students at first are intimidated by the computer. Based on an information form I distributed in my English Fundamentals course and my College Reading course at the beginning of the semester, approximately two-thirds of the students in both classes said they had no experience with the computer. But I don't give them much time to think about their fear of the computer. The first full week of class I begin taking them over to the lab in groups of three or four to personally supervise formatting and initializing their disks. The formatting is simple enough because in our computer lab the students never get

to the "C" prompt. The main menu is on the screen at all times and from it they simply call up "Utilities." Students call up Guides from the main menu, also. Once the students begin work on the program, they begin to make comments such as, "This is fun," or "I really think the exercises are helpful." In fact, I make a point of asking my students what they think when they turn in their assignments. In Dr. Penny Coggins' report on Developmental Studies at WOSC already mentioned, Dr. Coggins stated that computer-assisted instruction was very important to developmental studies courses. According to Dr. Coggins:

> "CAI serves two major purposes in developmental studies instruction: (1) it provides supplemental instructional exercises including drill and practice that cannot be provided in class and (2) it provides students the opportunity to experience computers in a user-friendly environment before entering college courses that require computer and data processing expertise. Appropriate use of CAI expands the instructor's reach by providing the opportunity to individualize instruction through the use of CAI modules specific to each student's needs."

That has also been my experience over the past year and a half working with Guides.

Based on my year and a half of experience using Guides in the classroom, I would offer the following teaching hints. The Guides Manual has been extremely helpful to me in teaching my

courses. The Manual is in a loose-leaf notebook format, so the pages are easily removable for photocopying purposes. I have made numerous transparencies from the Manual to demonstrate features of the program such as the branching capability of Guides, the student and instructor reports, and stopping points. I have even used photocopies of the charts on "Approximate Times Needed on the Diagnostic and Follow-Up Units" as a syllabus for the Guides, an approach I discovered just this semester; this has simplified the assignment process tremendously.

Over the past year and a half, my students and I have come across some minor glitches in the program, one of the most apparent being the way the units completed on the main menu of the Written Communications Skills module are marked. Once a unit has been completed, an asterisk appears beside it. What we discovered, however, was that the program arbitrarily marks two of the units but will not recognize the other two as having been completed even if the student repeats the units. Also, on the printout for the Follow-Up Unit on Memory (Reading and Study Skills Module), the score indicates 0 out of 20 questions correct even if the student made a perfect score. One of my students wrote down his answers on notepaper as proof that he had indeed made a perfect score, but even though he repeated the exercise two or three times, his score was still the same on the printout. When I first completed the exercise myself a year ago this spring, I received the same 0 out of 20 score as the students. I worked the exercise again this fall and the score was the same.

Another discovery that we made accidentally concerned the instructions in the Manual for the number of diskettes a student needs for Guides. The Manual states that a separate diskette is needed for each module; however, the students and I had already initialized the same diskette for both the Written Communication Skills and the Reading and Study Skills modules before I read that information in the Manual. The one diskette for both modules works fine. In fact, we also place our documents (writing assignments) on the same diskette. We use the three-and-a-half-inch high density disks in our computer lab, so there is plenty of storage available.

If I have a criticism of the mechanics of the program, it would be that the space bar is used to cycle through the menus and you can't backup as you can with the "up" and "down" arrow keys. That may seem like an insignificant criticism, but once a person becomes accustomed to an easy word processing program even a slight slow down becomes annoying.

Our experience with computer-assisted instruction in our English Fundamentals courses has been a long and winding road with many a twist and turn. We were originally looking for a panacea to the problem of what do we do with our English Fundamentals courses. We didn't find that, but Guides has provided the CAI component needed in our English Fundamentals courses and in our College Reading courses, and has enhanced the instruction of our composition courses.